Appearance, Disappearance, and Reappearance of AGREEMENT: How a theoretical account can be useful for us

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Agreement in natural languages is a centralized and pervasive phenomenon. And although, from this perspective, some languages may seem to be left out of the party completely, their apparent non-involvement in the phenomenon provide the necessary grist to the mill for one of the most common themes in grammar, namely, do we posit categories in languages of phenomena that do not appear on surface/ are morphologically invisible? The answer from the Generative corridor of the building is a resounding Yes (or we thought so, all along—more on this in the talk), and my suggestions for the "usefulness" of a generative theoretical paradigm for us (hence the subtitle), meaning, field workers and descriptivists of all hues is in fact built around justifying this affirmation.

But let me restart. It is because agreement is such a pervasive phenomenon (whether overt or not), it provides us with such an invaluable lens to map the syntactic behaviour of a language --- any language. However, this is easier said than done, i.e. the whole task of mapping the agreement (or other) 'mechanism' in a language can be overbearing, especially, if one is dealing with many of the intricate agreement systems of the languages spoken in and around here in Nepal. And in fact, there lies the importance of understanding how to understand agreement even better, theoretical or not. I will very strongly suggest that studying agreement merely typologically or descriptively misses out on sometime very obvious syntactic processes of the language that only a theoretical perspective may reveal.

Having said that, I will outline the nature of the love-hate relationship that theoretical syntax always had especially with agreement (hence the tile). But I will justify this vacillation as a mark of scientific progress as opposed to stagnation (i.e. as opposed to clutching on to one position for half-a-century or more, no matter what) and reaffirm that there are now more syntactic studies on agreement in different types of languages of the world than ever before—a situation that has emerged purely as a consequence of the generative paradigm reassigning the importance of agreement and making it a central theme of the theory. In short, I will convince you that being able to lay out the agreement system of a language is like being able to (finally) understand the syntax of the language.